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ABSTRACT

The success of educational restructuring depends on the quality of leadership exhibited by school administrators. A method to help administrators develop an achievable educational vision is presented in this paper, which focuses on developing strategies for actualizing an organizational vision statement. After a vision is designed, collaboration with others in the school improvement process is crucial for restructuring success. (19 references) (LMI)

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Restructuring, The Principal, and an Educational Vision: Key to Success

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Abstract

Restructuring is an attempt to maximize student learning and teaching in the nation's schools by seeking a new educational orientation. In reality, the success of restructuring rests on the quality of leadership exhibited by school administrators. The leader who has a vision of what schools can and should be ensures the success of the restructuring process. This paper presents a method by which an administrator may develop an educational vision that is viable and achievable. Once a vision is designed, Athen the visionary leader involves others in the process of improving schools.

Restructuring, The Principal, and an Educational Vision: Key to Success

The decade of the 1980's will be viewed historically as an era when a semblance of reform came to the American educational system. Without judging the degree and extent of that reform, it can be stated that any long-term success of reform depends upon the quality of educational leadership exhibited in the school (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Edmonds, 1979). There is evidence that a positive relationship exists between an effective administrator and the ability of a school to accomplish established goals and objectives (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Lipham, 1981).

The early days of the reform movement with top-down, state enforced mandates have given way to an understanding that schools must be restructured in some manner in order to maximize teaching and learning. Restructuring requires a unified focus by school personnel on the content or substance of the school; the people within the school; the physical structure of the school; and, the amount and type of time provided for student learning and teacher preparation. Restructuring means empowering school staff members by providing an educational culture that creates enhanced learning opportunities for all when improvement is

initiated by those who will carry it out (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Cuban, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 1984). The focus on school restructuring is doomed to failure without a proactive, supportive leadership stance from the schools' administrators. School principals, through both training and practice, have traditionally excluded staff members from many decision-making opportunities relating to curriculum, personnel, and scheduling (Zielinkski & Hoy, 1983). School leaders must recognize the need for a new leadership orientation if restructuring is to succeed.

Restructuring, to this point in time, has focused on providing teachers with an enhanced role in decision making, as well as an increased level of control over daily work conditions. Teachers have been provided broader opportunities in areas of mentoring, professional development, and teaching. However, both administrators and teachers have the same focus, both groups may become frustrated and disheartened without a unified sense of direction.

Recently the literature has introduced the concept of vision as an important leadership characteristic (Guthrie & Reed, 1986; Stallings & Mohlman, 1981). Visionary leadership has emerged as a prominent trait of high performing administrators (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980, Guthrie & Reed, 1986). The Principal Selection Guide (1987) published by the U. S. Department of Education states that

"effective school leaders have broad visions that are clear, active ambitious . . . " (p. 5) and that leaders often "create conditions to help them realize their vision" (p. 6). Principals must have a vision which is shared by and with the building level staff. This shared vision provides the vehicle, and the parameters, for successful restructuring efforts.

What is Vision?

Although vision has become a seemingly important aspect of effective educational leadership, it is not an easy construct to identify. There simply is no magic formula or item analysis that indicates how vision is formed, activated, or maintained. It can, however, be described as the force or the dream towards which effective administrators strive in the development and shaping of their schools (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Manasse, 1985; Rutherford, 1985; Shieve & Shoenheit, 1987).

The literature provides several definitions of vision. A generic one provided by Manasse (1985) described vision as "the development, transmission, and implementation of a desirable future" (p. 150). Shieve and Shoenheit (1987) identified vision as "a blueprint of a desired state. It is an image of a preferred condition that we work to achieve in the future" (p. 94). Grady and LeSourd (1988), in a synthesis of the literature, found five dominant qualities

of visionary leaders. They found that these leaders are motivated by personal values. Visionary leaders also have a commitment to the achievement of organizational goals. They also found that visionary leaders are organizational innovators who attempt to develop a common purpose among all organizational stakeholders. Finally, they discovered that visionary leaders consistently project a future that represents something better for the school.

The importance of strong personal values was supported by several other studies. Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) indicated that those with vision create an environment where personal values provide a foundation for the school culture. Manasse (1982) also ascertained that personal values were important. She indicated that the visions held by effective leaders are firmly established on publicly articulated values. Rutherford (1985), in an extensive study of effective principals, concluded that these administrators could discuss their visions for their schools without hesitation and could identify both long-range and short-range goals which would actualize the vision.

However one chooses to define vision, it is clear that effective educational leaders have one. Vision is a destination, albeit there may be many detours and roadblocks before established objectives are achieved. Vision provides a sense of direction. A visionary leader is not afraid of stating, "This is what I believe; this is what this school

can accomplish; and this is where we are going to be in one year, five years, and ten years." Vision is a force that facilitates organizational collaborations and helps establish the climate for the school because expectations, goals, and purposes are explicit and cogent.

Clearly, effective visionary leaders possess strong personal values. That particular element consistently manifests itself in the literature (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1988; Manasse, 1982; Rutherford, 1985; Shieve & Shoenheit, 1987). Values are much more than beliefs, because they are not easily changed and often remain constant throughout one's life. Beliefs, however, often change as perception changes.

Developing an Educational Vision

Educational leaders who wish to be more than managers or sustainers of the status quo must develop a strong personal vision prior to any other leadership activity. Vision originates as a personal concept and remains so long after it has become institutionalized as an organizational objective. The following strategies and techniques provide a structure for developing a personal vision and communicating that vision to others. A personal vision must reflect personal and professional values as well as an intense personal assessment of the school.

In developing a personal vision, several steps can be taken that facilitate and clarify what an effective leader wishes to accomplish. First, one should think about characteristics and attributes of both successful and poor leaders and determine which characteristics more closely resemble his/her particular individual leadership style. Answering the following questions will also assist in further identifying personal values.

1. What are my five greatest strengths?
2. What are my five greatest weaknesses?
3. What are the three things I value most in my professional life?
4. What are the most important things I wish to accomplish in this school?
5. What do I want to prove as an educator/administrator?
6. With what style of leadership am I most comfortable?
7. How would I like to be remembered as an leader?

These questions are designed to assess factors which inherently motivate as well as focus on the reasons why one elects to become an educator/administrator. After careful evaluation of the answers, which often leads to other questions, it is important that a short vision statement be written which reflects a personalized and individualized vision of the school. Since this is a personal vision statement, it may emulate either highly personal values, such as family or love, or more universal values, such as equity and justice. The statement needs to meet two simple criteria. First, it should be short because this helps one avoid educational jargonese. Second, it should not be

hampered by the reality of organizational, economic, or political restraints. The vision statement reflects what one ideally desires to accomplish in a school.

Once one has developed a vision statement, he/she must answer the following two questions before unveiling the vision to other school personnel.

1. Does it reflect what is really important?
2. Am I willing, as a leader, to model it, fight for it, explain it, clarify it, and sell it to the staff?

If the answer is yes to both questions, then it is time to consider how to involve others in the development of an organizational vision. Once the building administrator has developed his/her personal vision, the whole staff should be involved in the development of an overall organizational vision. This organizational vision is developed in a manner similar to the personal vision. School personnel, both individually and in small groups, answer the following questions.

1. What are five strengths of this school?
2. What are five weaknesses of this school?
3. What are three external factors which help or hinder the proper functioning of the school?
4. What is the existing relationship between various groups and components of the school?
5. What does the ideal school look like?
6. What does this school really stand for?

These questions are designed to assess factors relating to the school. They are also designed to create a dialogue between those within the school. This is important because those involved in this dialogue will be those who must agree

upon the organizational vision and will eventually establish short and long term goals for the school.

Each staff member, after answering the above questions and after small group discussion, will then write an organizational vision statement which reflects what the school should be in an ideal sense. The individual statements should be short and concise. Small groups will then compile all the statements, seek similarities, and through a consensus process develop an overall organizational vision for the individual school. From this vision statement, goals and objectives for the school are further developed.

It is important to note that when the building administrator elects to involve his/her staff in this manner, then he/she must be willing to live with the organizational vision as it has been developed. If the organizational vision is outrageously different from the personal vision statement of the administrator, then a problem exists. However, this rarely happens, providing the principal is actively involved with his/her staff during the developmental process. This is truly collaboration at its best.

Once the organizational vision statement is developed, it is necessary to design methods by which the vision can be communicated. Again, the total staff is involved in communicating the vision. This is a critical part of the

process. Only through effective communication strategies can one ever hope to gain support of all school personnel and the community. Communication is best when it focuses on what the school will be once the vision is actualized. Manasse (1985) calls this a future vision because it represents a better future for the school.

Metaphorical statements, symbols, or models are useful tools in communicating the vision. Pronouncements such as "A School for All Children", "Excellence and Equity", and "Striving for Excellence" provide direction for the school. Communicating effectively requires creativity and imagination on the part of all school personnel. A picture of an ideal state must be clearly depicted so that all understand it. Martin Luther Kings's speech I Have a Dream is a wonderful example of communicating a vision. This speech, crowded with metaphorical statements and symbols, represents King's vision of America.

Shieve and Shoenheit (1987) identified several distinct steps for the development and actualization of a vision. These are: (1) see it, (2) own it, (3) develop strategies to achieve it, and (4) begin acting on the vision (p.99). Developing strategies and acting on the vision are ideal places where one may begin to utilize empowering school-based or site-based management approaches.

Conclusion

Developing a personal administrative vision for a school and the utilization of site-based management and restructuring techniques for the design of an overall organizational vision are not antithetical to one another. Good leaders believe in their ideas and sell them to others. Certainly, aspects relating to how the vision is to be achieved may be changed as others become involved. Restructuring does not mean that an administrator abdicates his/her responsibility as a leader. It does mean that others should be actively involved in developing an organizational vision and in actualizing that vision. The involvement of others in this process is not necessarily easy or tidy, but true leadership and collaboration are often not easy or tidy.

Administrators who utilize shared decision-making as well as team building activities, and who believe that schools should be places where teachers can instruct and all students can learn, are visionary leaders. Successful administrators are more than managers and officers; they are leaders. They understand that without direction and purpose school programs, facilities, and faculty morale will begin to deteriorate, accelerating as time passes. To prevent this, an effective leader must work with others to guide the school to a higher level of achievement.

An effective principal with his/her staff develops a vision which provides an optimum destination. The journey to that destination can be exciting and rewarding when a visionary leader collaborates with all the school's stakeholders. This destination should reflect not what the school should be but what the school will be. Developing and creating a vision is the first priority, not the last, for a restructured school. Then, and only then, will schools chart a path that allows for education's full potential to be achieved.

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